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# When media of a small nation argue for war

Stig Hjarvard and Nete Nørgaard Kristensen

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

[stig@hum.ku.dk](mailto:stig@hum.ku.dk) and [netenk@hum.ku.dk](mailto:netenk@hum.ku.dk)

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## Abstract

In this comparative analysis of editorial columns in Danish newspapers, we analyze how news media can act as a political voice during times of war. Whereas most studies of media coverage of war focus on one specific war, this analysis provides empirically and theoretically grounded conclusions across three wars: Afghanistan 2001–, Iraq 2003–2007, and Libya 2011. The analysis focuses on the interpretative frames that are mobilized concerning the cause of conflict, the legitimacy of war, and the rationales for deploying Danish troops. Various models of elite–media relationships are considered and modified from a theoretical perspective in order to take into account the particular problems involved for a small nation going to war. The analysis largely confirms the influence of elite consensus or dissensus on media coverage. Other influential factors include the media system and the semi-autonomous status of newspapers as an elite voice competing with other opinion-making elites.

## Keywords

Afghanistan war, editorials, framing, Iraq war, Libyan conflict, political elite

## Introduction

This article examines the role of Danish newspapers as active elite actors voicing opinions and recommending the use or non-use of military power. Since 2001, Denmark has not only expanded its military presence in Afghanistan but has also become actively involved in two other wars, Iraq 2003–2007 and Libya 2011. We focus on editorial columns of national Danish newspapers and analyze how various interpretative frames are mobilized concerning the cause of conflict, the legitimacy of war, and the rationales for deploying Danish troops for combat. More specifically, we ask:

- What are the main topics, and how are the different wars framed in editorials?
- Does the type of newspaper and its general political orientation influence the framing of the war?
- In what ways might the newspapers' editorial position be dependent on the political context, including the degree of consensus/dissensus among the political elites?

The Danish news media's political stances on the three wars represents an intriguing case internationally, since political elites and newspapers have been generally supportive of the use of military force in conflicts against various forms of 'terrorism' for over a decade. Under the political umbrella of Denmark's 'activist foreign policy', political parties from across the political spectrum came to support the use of Danish military forces for combat operations (Olesen, 2012; Svendsen et al., 2012). Considered in this context, the continued high level of support may be an interesting test case for examining the interplay between the news media and political elites in a small and hitherto less belligerent nation, especially because the analysis takes into account three wars in different political contexts.

Various models and theories have been developed to consider the relationships between media and political elites (e.g. Bennett, 1990; Entman, 2004; Hallin, 1986;

Robinson, 2001; Robinson et al., 2010), but these models have most often relied on studies of great military (super)powers, like the USA or UK, both of which have long traditions of military engagement in other countries and have the power to engage in war by themselves (Robinson et al., 2010: 174). In contrast, Denmark's military engagement over the past decade has represented a clear departure from the preceding half century's foreign policy, in which Denmark had primarily deployed troops abroad for UN peacekeeping missions, and Denmark's use of military force can only be carried out in coalition with other, much larger military powers. As a consequence, both Danish political elites and news media must take into account to a much higher degree the wider global context in general and larger coalition partners in particular when they consider going to war. In continuation of our previous research (Hjarvard et al., 2004; Kristensen and Ørsten, 2007), in this study, we consider existing models concerning the relationship between political elites and news media in the context of a small nation and discuss how the 'elite-driven model' in particular (Robinson, 2001; Robinson et al., 2010) is reflected in the ways that news media argue for or against the use of military force.

## **Methodology**

The study is based on an analysis of editorials in five Danish national newspapers: three broadsheets with different political orientations *Politiken* (centre-left, 361,000 daily readers, winter 2012/13), *Jyllands-Posten* (right-wing liberal, 321,00 daily readers, winter 2012/13), and *Berlingske Tidende* (right-wing conservative, 240,000 daily readers, winter 2012/13); the populist right-wing tabloid *B.T.* (204,000 daily readers, winter 2012/13); and a left-leaning niche newspaper, *Information* (103,000 daily readers, winter 2012/13) (Gallup, 2013). The analysis focuses on editorials because this genre's opinionated and official character makes it the most explicit source of a newspaper's political viewpoints. The sample covers four weeks before and after the parliamentary decisions

on Danish participation in the wars. Due to the time span of the Afghanistan war, the analysis includes two periods in relation to this war:

- *Afghanistan 2001*: 16 November 2001 – 11 January 2002. Parliamentary decision 14 December 2001 on participation in Afghanistan. Danish troops were sent to Afghanistan 9 January 2002.
- *Afghanistan 2008*: 11 November 2008 – 6 January 2009. Parliamentary decision 9 December 2008 on sending additional forces to Afghanistan.
- *Iraq*: 23 February 2003 – 20 April 2003. Parliamentary decision 21 March 2003 on Danish military participation in Iraq. The bombardment began 20 March 2003.
- *Libya*: 18 February 2011 – 15 April 2011. Parliamentary decision 18 March 2011 on Danish participation in no-fly zone over Libya.

Two research assistants sampled the editorials by means of Infomedia (2012), an online provider of Danish print, broadcast, and online media. The main sampling criterion was that the editorial should concern Danish military participation in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. However, the sample also included editorials that indirectly touched upon these issues, for example by discussing the military engagements of the international community or different countries' views of the war on terror. The study is thus based on an inclusive sampling of 313 editorials.

The analysis is based primarily on a qualitative textual analysis (Schrøder, 2012) and supported by a quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Complementing one another (Jensen, 2012), the qualitative textual analysis uses an inductive approach to provide nuances of and empirical grounding for observations whereas the quantitative content analysis provides an overview through a deductive approach. In both analyses, we focus on the discursive 'framing' of war: This is a common approach in research on

media coverage of war (e.g. Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005) although it is characterized by varying methodological approaches (De Vreese, 2005). Our framing analysis relies on Entman's (1993: 52) definition:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.

Through our combined inductive and deductive approach, we have identified a number of overall *themes*: Denmark at war (i.e. its own war efforts), Denmark and international politics, and the background and legitimacy of the war. Within these overall themes, we located more specific *frames*, which in Entman's terms concerned problem definition and/or causal interpretation, i.e. the causes of the conflict, and evaluation, i.e. the legitimacy of the war and/or proposals for solutions (e.g. international alliances and joint forces). In particular, we have considered the extent to which the war efforts were critically framed or legitimized by referring to civilian (i.e. humanitarian purposes, fight for democracy, fight for peace and/or civilian development) or military considerations (i.e. the removal of a dictator, 'war on terror', weapons of mass destruction). The quantitative analysis was conducted by a research assistant, based on a codebook, and all codings were subsequently checked by the authors. In the discussion, we compare our findings from the textual analyses with the various political elite opinions during the same periods. We do not, however, conduct an independent analysis of opinions among the political elites, relying instead on official sources setting forth these opinions (Danish Parliament, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2011) and existing analyses of Danish foreign and military policies (Jakobsen and Møller, 2012; Olesen, 2012; Rasmussen, 2011; Svendsen et al., 2012).

### **Theoretical framework: News media and the political elite**

Our analysis is informed by recent developments in theories concerning the influence of political elites on news media's reporting of foreign policy issues, including war. Hallin's (1986) study of the American news media's coverage of the Vietnam War suggested that 'the behavior of the media ... is intimately related to the unity and clarity of the government itself, as well as to the degree of consensus in the society at large' (p. 213). Robinson (2001) integrated insights from Hallin (1986) and other contributions into his 'policy-media interaction model'. In this model, the media's ability to influence public opinion and political decision making is determined first and foremost by the level of consensus among the political elite. If political elites agree about a particular issue, it is very difficult for the media to develop and sustain alternative viewpoints and influence public opinion. In this situation, the media will largely reflect the dominant elite's viewpoints and manufacture consent for these in the general public (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). When disagreements arise within elite circles, media will be able to advance dissenting viewpoints, but these will primarily reflect the range of available viewpoints among the elite and will not act as independent voices. In this situation, the media reflect what Hallin (1986) terms the 'sphere of legitimate controversy'. This part of the model is similar to the 'indexing model' because the media 'index' the spectrum of available opinions or frames among the elite (Bennett, 1990; Mermin, 1999). However, when elite dissensus is accompanied by uncertainty about policies in government, news media gain independence and may be able to frame coverage in more critical ways and influence government's decision-making process.

Entman's (2004) 'cascading network activation model' represents a more complex development of the elite-driven model. The core idea is that political communication cascades through several levels (government, parliament, media, public, etc.), and each

level may influence the further transmission, (re-)direction, and (re-)framing of the political message. Journalists may contest the frames provided by an elite consensus if the frames appear incongruent with, for instance, popular sentiments or ideals of journalism. In their study of British news media's coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Robinson et al. (2010) supplement the policy–media interaction model (Robinson, 2001) with other explanatory models. They recommend that future studies pay greater attention to factors such as professional autonomy and media system characteristics to counterbalance the constraining factors identified by the elite-driven model. In our study, we discuss the explanatory potential of the elite-driven model in relation to Danish data as well as consider some of the alternative or complementary frameworks, including media system characteristics and factors of special relevance to understanding how the press relates to foreign affairs in a small country.

The elite-driven model is developed within an American context and thus within a liberal media system that differs considerably from the Danish system, which is based on the democratic corporatist model (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Although research suggests developments towards the liberal model, the Danish media system remains characterized by political parallelism, professional autonomy, and press subsidies that aim at ensuring a diverse press with high circulation (e.g. Allern and Blach-Ørsten, 2011). In other words, the newspapers' political positions also reflect national historical circumstances. Despite the decline of the Danish party press during the 20th century, many newspapers continue to hold political orientations and portions of the press have been re-politicized over recent years by giving priority to particular political points of view (Hjarvard, 2010). The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya may have served as opportunities for strengthening such editorial profiles. As a consequence, the Danish newspapers may reflect the consensus and dissensus among the political elites as predicted by the elite-driven model, but their opinions may be conditioned by more than just the specific



degree of elite consensus or dissensus on any given issue at any given time. Their patterns of opinions are also 'built into' the press system through the structure of political parallelism. Newspapers not only reproduce or reflect the points of view of the political elite but, due to their historically developed profiles, also position themselves as political elite voices. In this light, the elite-driven model must take into consideration the particularities of the media system in question.

## Analysis

### *Afghanistan 2001*

The qualitative analysis of editorials commenting on the *early Afghanistan war* (2001) indicates that Danish newspapers were first and foremost concerned with the *international community's military* legitimization for entering Afghanistan. A recurring framing was 'the war on terror', and most newspapers identified Osama bin Laden as being responsible for the war. On 1 December 2001, the broadsheet *Jyllands-Posten* asserts:

The war in Afghanistan, which aims to eradicate the international terror network, is very successful militarily. Within a surprisingly short period of time, the Northern Alliance has succeeded in overrunning the Taliban regime, heavily supported by targeted American bombardment ... Now we await the decisive effort in the difficult terrain on the Pakistan border, where the terror leader Osama bin Laden is believed to be hiding.

Also the broadsheet, *Berlingske Tidende* stresses, 8 December 2001, the role of the international community:

The suppressing fundamentalist militia no longer controls Afghanistan. Its leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, is now a fugitive, as is the man who was protected by the Taliban – the terrorist leader Osama bin Laden ... now the international community, with the US taking the lead, must find out what to do with those responsible for the international terror that struck Western civilization with unknown force September 11.

These quotes exemplify the support for American policy as well as a framing closely associated with 'the war on terror', which characterized several newspapers' editorials. Even though some newspapers also framed the war as an intervention with *civilian* goals, regarding it especially as a fight for democracy and human rights, the Danish editorials

echoed the atmosphere characterizing much of the Western world in the aftermath of 9/11, epitomized by the by now legendary *Le Monde* headline of ‘We are all Americans’ the day after the attack on the Twin Towers (e.g. Taylor, 2008). Most of the analyzed newspapers supported the engagements, with only the niche newspaper *Information* expressing reluctance and regarding the war as a demonstration of American power and as part of a larger American pursuit in the Middle East. On 22 November 2001, for example, *Information* asked: ‘Is the “terror war” then to be expanded, or is it over? Part of the American government has become fixated on Iraq, which they accuse – like the Taliban in Afghanistan – of sponsoring international terrorism.’

These qualitative observations are supported by the quantitative analysis, which shows that, thematically, ‘the background and legitimacy of the war’ was important in all of the analyzed newspapers and that the dominant framing was military explanations (see Tables 1 and 2), with some broader social and political themes represented as well.

**Table 1.** Dominating themes in editorial discussions of Afghanistan war 2001: Number of editorials.

	<i>Politiken</i> (n = 23)	<i>Berlingske Tidende</i> (n = 11)	<i>Jyllands-Posten</i> (n = 8)	<i>Information</i> (n = 18)	<i>B.T.</i> (n = 5)	Total (n = 65)
Denmark at war	3	3	1			7
Denmark and international politics		1	2	1		4
Background and legitimacy of the war	10	6	4	12	4	36
Other dominating themes	10	1	1	5	1	18

**Table 2.** Editorial framing of Afghanistan war 2001: Number of editorials.

	<i>Politiken</i> (n = 23)	<i>Berlingske Tidende</i> (n = 11)	<i>Jyllands-Posten</i> (n = 8)	<i>Information</i> (n = 18)	<i>B.T.</i> (n = 5)	Total (n = 65)
Civilian legitimization	6	4	1	3	1	15
Military legitimization	5	4	4	10	3	26
Critique of war				1		1
Other framing of the war	12	3	3	4	1	23

Neither Denmark as a belligerent nation nor Denmark as part of international political and/or military alliances were dominating issues, just as the editorials rarely expressed opinions about *Danish* participation in the war. When Danish perspectives were included, the editorials mainly underlined the symbolic nature of the Danish military contribution. For example, under the headline 'A symbolic gesture' the broadsheet *Berlingske Tidende* asserts on 1 December 2001: 'If we take a closer look at the Danish military package ... it is obvious that it is mostly a symbolic gesture. A symbolic declaration that Denmark wishes to take our share of the responsibility.'

### *Afghanistan 2008*

By 2008, there had been military engagements in *Afghanistan* for more than six years, and the war instigated only limited debate in Danish newspaper editorials and typically at the periphery of the actual war action. The debate linked instead – and more profoundly than in 2001 – to broader issues of international politics and security, for example the Guantánamo Bay detention facility and the newly elected American president Barack Obama and his foreign policy.

When focusing on the actual war action, the Danish efforts and costs came more to the fore. Arguments about the military efforts legitimized as 'a war on terror' had nearly ceased, as had civilian and humanitarian lines of reasoning. Accordingly, no single villain was identified any longer, and expression of Danish support for international (e.g. American) policy was more or less absent although only a few editorials were explicitly critical. The editorials' shift of opinion reflected the changing political climate, from international consensus and support at the beginning of the Afghanistan war to an emerging national focus and skepticism after almost seven years of Danish and international military action. An article from *Berlingske Tidende* exemplifies this change. On 22 December 2008, the newspaper published the editorial 'Danish losses', arguing that 'the

increasing number of casualties says it all about the situation. Little is under control, and the presence of NATO forces everywhere in the area has made no noticeable difference to the security situation.’ Besides exemplifying changing opinions about the efforts in Afghanistan, the editorial indicates a shift from a dominant focus on ideologies and value politics to an emerging discussion of realpolitik.

These more qualitative observations are again supported by data from the content analysis (see Tables 3 and 4), indicating a very diverse outlook since nearly one in two editorials use the ongoing war in Afghanistan as an occasion to debate broader international issues, and most editorials include arguments outside the framework of military or civilian rationales for war.

Table 3 indicates that the tabloid *B.T.* in particular applied a national focus and was the only newspaper to continue explicitly supporting the Danish war efforts and the war more generally. For example, when the bodies of two Danish soldiers killed in Afghanistan were brought back to Denmark on 12 December 2008, *B.T.* argued, under the headline ‘Thank you for your courage’:

Whether you support the war in Afghanistan or not, think about Jacob Grønnegaard Gade and Dan Gyde today. Maybe they can inspire you to do something unselfish for another human being, and if the spirits of Gade and Gyde are spread around the globe, one day, young men may not need to die so far, far away from home.

Besides confirming the increasing focus on realpolitik, this quote indicates that the reasons for supporting the war in spite of its casualties were more indeterminate compared with the early Afghanistan war’s military framing of the ‘war on terror’ and the search for Osama bin Laden.

### *Iraq 2003*

Of the three wars, the editorials debated the war in *Iraq in 2003* most intensively. Accordingly, the quantitative data show quite distinct patterns: For example, even though the ‘background and legitimacy of the war’ dominated all of the newspapers thematically,

‘Denmark at war’ had become an important theme as well (Table 5).

**Table 3.** Dominating themes in editorial discussions of Afghanistan war 2008: Number of editorials.

	<i>Politiken</i> (n = 5)	<i>Berlingske Tidende</i> (n = 3)	<i>Jyllands-Posten</i> (n = 6)	<i>Information</i> (n = 15)	<i>B.T.</i> (n = 6)	Total (n = 35)
Denmark at war	1	1	1	2	5	10
Denmark and international politics			1	2	1	4
Background and legitimacy of the war	3		1	2		6
Other dominating themes	1	2	3	9		15

**Table 4.** Editorial framing of Afghanistan war 2008: Number of editorials.

	<i>Politiken</i> (n = 5)	<i>Berlingske Tidende</i> (n = 3)	<i>Jyllands-Posten</i> (n = 6)	<i>Information</i> (n = 15)	<i>B.T.</i> (n = 6)	Total (n = 35)
Civilian legitimization			1		2	3
Military legitimization	1	1				2
Critique of war	2		1	2		5
Other framing of the war	2	2	4	13	4	25

**Table 5.** Dominating themes in editorial discussions of Iraq war 2003: Number of editorials.

	<i>Politiken</i> (n = 31)	<i>Berlingske Tidende</i> (n = 30)	<i>Jyllands-Posten</i> (n = 41)	<i>Information</i> (n = 27)	<i>B.T.</i> (n = 19)	Total (n = 148)
Denmark at war	6	5	16	2	7	36
Denmark and international politics	4	3	8	2	1	18
Background and legitimacy of the war	15	14	17	16	10	72
Other dominating themes	6	8		7	1	22

The Danish focus was especially prevalent in the broadsheet *Jyllands-Posten* and the tabloid *B.T.* For example, on the day before the invasion, 19 March 2003, *Jyllands-Posten* argues:

Denmark's position in the international community of law is too important to become the object of another bitter footnote of obstruction by the Social Democrats ... Denmark should not contribute to the reinvention of a strategic great power play on the European continent, which we have put behind us, not least through favorable assistance from the USA in two great wars. Denmark belongs on the side of peace and freedom. And in this case, this means that we belong on the side of the USA, the UK, and a long list of other countries.

Indicating a more divided standpoint, *B.T.* reasons on 26 March 2003 that 'The Danes are split when it comes to the question of the legitimacy of the war – at this moment, we are split into two almost equal halves.' These quotes reflect an altered national political climate and media focus in comparison with that at the commencement of the Afghanistan war two years earlier. The editorials increasingly discussed Denmark as a warfaring nation but also as part of international political alliances, notwithstanding the essentially emblematic nature of the Danish contribution, just as they discussed the *national* political dissensus as to the invasion of Iraq.

Accordingly, the framing of this war was more dichotomized than was the framing of the war in Afghanistan, as more arguments were brought in to support or oppose the invasion. Civilian frames – legitimizing the war especially as a humanitarian effort and as a fight for democracy and human rights – competed first and foremost with more critical frames, implying that the war was illegitimate, an American demonstration of power, or otherwise reprehensible (see Table 6). In other words, conflicting frames mirrored the fragmented national political debate prior to the military engagements as well as mirrored newspapers clearly positioning themselves on conflicting poles of the framing axis, denoting a re-politicization of Danish newspapers (Hjarvard, 2010).

Military framings of the war, justifying it especially as an effort to remove Saddam

Hussein, who was frequently identified as being responsible for the war, were particularly prominent in the center-right broadsheets *Berlingske Tidende* and *Jyllands-Posten*.

Under the headline 'It's time' on 18 March 2003, two days before the invasion, *Berlingske Tidende* argues:

If we fail to do something about the threat now, we not only risk Iraq accumulating more weapons, which will demand even more sacrifices to neutralize. We also run the risk of Saddam Hussein preemptively deploying his weapons of mass destruction.

Besides making Saddam Hussein responsible for the allies' imminent invasion, this quote takes as its point of departure the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, despite their existence not having been established. It thus mirrors findings by Robinson et al. (2010: 165) who arrive at a similar conclusion regarding the British news media's coverage. The same Danish newspapers also framed the war as legitimated by its civilian goals, including the aforementioned removal of Saddam Hussein, a removal that was, consequently, conceived of as part of both military and civilian rationales.

The center-left broadsheet *Politiken* and the left-wing niche newspaper *Information*, on the other hand, openly framed the war critically as being without civilian or military justification and, in the case of *Information*, also as a demonstration of American power.

A week before the invasion, on 12 March 2003, *Politiken*, for example, argues that:

It would still be the best solution if the UN Security Council would agree on the course – an ultimatum for Saddam Hussein combined with a prolonged deadline should still be an alternative. If that fails, everything indicates that the war approaches anyway – and fast. If this happens after a UN collapse, Denmark obviously cannot participate.

In stronger terms, *Information* writes one day later, on 13 March 2003, that:

For the United States, the Iraq war is first and foremost about fortifying its global dominance – and the opposition therefore reflects a rebellion against the global hegemony of the United States and against the Americans' attempt to get their way by means of intimidation and bullying.

None of the newspapers, however, adopt particularly militant or patriotic discourses.

The war was not described as being about protecting Danish interests or national borders; instead, all of the newspapers framed it within the international Western community's

fight against undemocratic, terrorist regimes. Furthermore, as was also the case for the early Afghanistan war, editorial critique of the Danish engagements ceased once Danish troops were deployed, even in *Politiken* and *Information*. Just five days after the very critical editorial quoted above, *Information* argues on 7 April 2003:

The war has not resulted in the evil, horrific scenario against which the opponents warned. The time for moderation and reflection is past. This Iraq war should ... not be stopped now even though one could argue like an accountant that it did not receive the UN's legitimizing sanction. If the war is ended before Bush and Blair have won, it will not weaken the fanatic fundamentalists' desire for global terror and hatred towards secular democracy.

This again reflects the national political climate in 2003, when critical opinions voiced by the opposition (Social Democrats, Socialist People's Party, and Red-Green Alliance) in particular were downplayed following the invasion and the deployment of Danish troops to secure the construction of a new order.

### *Libya 2011*

When Denmark participated in the *Libyan conflict in 2011*, the international context and Denmark's role in international politics came even further to the fore in the editorials while the legitimacy of the war as well as Denmark's status as a warring nation were less imperative. Accordingly, all of the newspapers with the exception of *Information* framed the Libyan conflict within an ideological or value-political context – as a fight for democracy and human rights – and echoed the more general discourse of the international public debate concerning the 'Arab Spring' (e.g. Allan, 2013; Mair and Keeble, 2011). *Politiken*, for example, argues on 21 March 2011 that 'The course of events has shown that the age of humanitarian interventions is not over and that the UN has regained its legitimizing role.' On 4 April 2011, *Berlingske Tidende* asserts in more general terms that:

We have known for years that there is an urgent need for modernization and democratization in the Arab world ... The Arab Spring represents freedom, and it is in the



interests of democracies that the Arab populations get the chance to choose their own leaders by means of genuine and fair elections.

Most newspapers framed the Libyan leader as the personification of the conflict and as the immediate reason for the international intervention – and as the point of reference for a more ideological framing of the war as a fight for freedom, democracy, and human rights. For example, on 21 March 2011, the broadsheet *Berlingske Tidende* writes under the headline ‘The war against Gaddafi’ that:

In the case of Libya, a point had been reached where it was impossible to continuously avoid taking action against the dictator Gaddafi’s brutal actions against rebels and civilians ... The world had to take action. Period.

The quantitative content analysis confirms these qualitative observations, showing that ‘Denmark and international politics’ was the dominant theme, indicating a focal shift from the previous wars. ‘The background and legitimacy of the war’ continued to be important as well but was framed, first and foremost, in the light of civilian rationales (see Tables 7 and 8). A national focus on ‘Denmark at war’ was important primarily to the tabloid *B.T.* Accordingly, all of the newspapers – with the exception of *Information* – supported Danish participation and the military intervention more generally, as indicated by the quotes above. The niche newspaper *Information* stands out because it framed the military action in Libya critically in every second editorial (Table 8) and explicitly opposed the war when expressing opinions about the Danish as well as the international military engagements.

On 4 March 2011, an editorial argues:

Yes, the Libyan civil war entails risks to the West in the form of the price of petrol and oil in, for example, Denmark. And no, there are no good reasons for military intervention, neither liberal nor humanitarian reasons. The political consequences are inestimable. What the West can do is convey humanitarian aid to refugees deluged in Egypt and Tunisia.

*Information* thus not only distances itself from the prevailing opinion of the newspapers but also from the political atmosphere characterized by consensus across the political spectrum.

**Table 6.** Editorial framing of Iraq war 2003: Number of editorials.

	<i>Politiken</i> (n = 31)	<i>Berlingske</i> <i>Tidende</i> (n = 30)	<i>Jyllands-</i> <i>Posten</i> (n = 41)	<i>Infor-</i> <i>mation</i> (n = 27)	<i>B.T.</i> (n = 19)	Total (n = 148)
Civilian legitimization		18	20	3	8	49
Military legitimization	2	12	12		3	29
Critique of war	20		1	17	3	41
Other framing of the war	9		8	7	5	29

**Table 7.** Dominating themes in editorial discussions of Libya war 2011. Number of editorials.

	<i>Politiken</i> (n = 10)	<i>Berlingske</i> <i>Tidende</i> (n = 10)	<i>Jyllands-</i> <i>Posten</i> (n = 9)	<i>Infor-</i> <i>mation</i> (n = 22)	<i>B.T.</i> (n = 9)	Total (n = 60)
Denmark at war	2	3		4	4	13
Denmark and international politics	3	5	3	8	3	22
Background and legitimacy of the war	4	2	4	7	2	19
Other dominating themes	1		2	3		6

**Table 8.** Editorial framing of Libya war 2011: Number of editorials.

	<i>Politiken</i> (n = 10)	<i>Berlingske</i> <i>Tidende</i> (n = 10)	<i>Jyllands-</i> <i>Posten</i> (n = 9)	<i>Infor-</i> <i>mation</i> (n = 22)	<i>B.T.</i> (n = 9)	Total (n = 60)
Civilian legitimization	5	4	5	1	8	23
Military legitimization	5	5	2			12
Critique of war				12		12
Other framing of the war		1	2	9	1	13

### Discussion: Editorial views in political context

In this section, we compare newspaper editorial opinions on the wars with the political contexts of the four periods in question and consider in particular the extent to which the political elites are characterized by political consensus, dissensus, or uncertainty. By this means, we will be able to consider whether the newspapers' opinions follow the predictions

of the elite-driven model or show signs of a more independent or even oppositional voice.

Table 9 provides an overview of the editorial views of the newspapers in comparison with the political context. The comparison includes not only the national political elite but also Denmark's various foreign alliance partners (NATO, EU, and larger Western countries), which both Danish politicians and newspapers typically take into account when discussing foreign policy issues in a small nation like Denmark.

Table 10 provides a more detailed overview of the distribution of votes in Danish parliament concerning the use of Danish military force. In 2001, when the Danish parliament, Folketinget, decided to send troops to Afghanistan, there was considerable consensus in both the Danish political system and among Denmark's usual Western allies that a military presence in Afghanistan was necessary in order to fight international terrorism. This political context is clearly reflected in all of the newspapers' editorials, where we find strong support for the international war on terror and the military presence of the coalition in Afghanistan whereas Denmark's military contribution to the war is given little attention.

At the time of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the political context is significantly altered, nationally as well as internationally. An anti-war movement had surfaced in several countries, and several of the USA's traditional allies became hesitant about the war or explicitly opposed an invasion, and both among the Danish political elite and the newspapers, we find doubt about and criticism of the USA's justifications for waging war against the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein: the existence of weapons of mass destruction and the Iraqi regime's connections with Al-Qaeda. Danish parliament was divided on the issue, and the decision to send Danish troops to war was supported only by the right-wing governing alliance while center-left parties voted against Danish engagement. The deployment of Danish troops for the Iraq Stability Force

was later supported by the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats. In consonance with the elite-driven model, elite dissensus (nationally as well as internationally) was accompanied by a more explicit and critical discussion in the newspaper editorials of Denmark's position on the war. There were clear signs of political parallelism because the spectrum of the newspapers' opinions reflected the range of political attitudes towards the war among the political parties. There was not a high degree of policy uncertainty among the political elite: the governments of both the USA and Denmark were quite clear and outspoken in support of the invasion while several European governments (e.g. France and Germany) and the Danish political opposition were opposed. There was, however, critical media coverage both nationally and internationally, which questioned the existence of weapons of mass destruction and an Iraqi connection with Al-Qaeda although the ruling elites managed largely to refute these doubts prior to the invasion.

In 2008, the economic and human costs of the military commitment in Afghanistan and Iraq in particular had put pressure on the political elites in Denmark and internationally. It had by now become clear that the two main arguments for the Iraq war – weapons of mass destruction and the Al-Qaeda connection – were at best unsustainable and at worst fabricated to legitimize the war. Several countries had begun pulling troops out, and Denmark, for instance, had withdrawn most of its forces from Iraq by 2007. Furthermore, disclosures of the US military's torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison had negatively influenced public opinion. There nevertheless remained a delicate political

**Table 9.** Editorial views of the newspapers in comparison with the political context.

War/period	National political elite	International context of Western allies (EU, NATO, major powers)	Newspapers' voice of opinion		
			Broadsheet Newspapers ( <i>Politiken, Jyllands-Posten and Berlingske</i> )	Tabloid newspaper ( <i>B.T.</i> )	Niche newspaper ( <i>Information</i> )
<b>Afghanistan 2001</b>	Strong consensus about general commitment to war on terror and support for mission in Afghanistan	Consensus about general commitment to war on terror and mission in Afghanistan	Strong support for war in Afghanistan, but less focus on Danish military participation	Strong support for war in Afghanistan, but less focus on Danish military participation	Some skepticism towards war in Afghanistan, but less focus on Danish military participation
<b>Iraq 2003</b>	Strong dissensus about commitment to war – parliament divided	Strong dissensus internationally and within countries about commitment to war	Newspapers divided in opinion: <i>Politiken</i> strongly against war, <i>JP</i> and <i>Berlingske</i> strongly in favor. More explicit focus on Danish military participation	Strong support for war. More explicit focus on Danish military participation	Highly critical of war. More explicit focus on Danish military participation
<b>Afghanistan 2008</b>	Fragile consensus about commitment to war; disagreement about conduct and exit strategy	Emerging dissensus about overall commitment and emerging uncertainty about strategy and final date of military engagement	Support for war in Afghanistan, but also skepticism. Less focus on Danish military participation	Support for war in Afghanistan but also skepticism	Some skepticism. Less focus on Danish military participation
<b>Libya 2011</b>	Strong consensus about deployment of Danish forces to no-fly zone in Libya. Dissensus about land military operations	General consensus about no-fly zone. Dissensus and uncertainty about possible land military operations	Strong support for war	Strong support for war	Expresses skepticism towards war

**Table 10.** Votes in Danish Parliament concerning the use of Danish military forces.

	Parliamentary decision no. / date	For	Against	Absent*
Afghanistan 2001	B 37 / December 14	101**	11	67
Iraq 2003	B 118 / March 21	61***	50	68
Afghanistan 2008	B 24 / December 9	88****	16	75
Libya 2011	B 89 / March 18	110*****	0	69

\*Absence only technically means non-vote; the voting preferences for all parties and members are known in advance, allowing MPs to be absent from the actual voting if they have other business to attend.

\*\**Governing parties*: Venstre – the Liberal Party of Denmark; Conservative People's Party. *Government supporting party*: Danish People's party. *Opposition/other*: Social Democrats (except two MPs), Danish Social Liberal Party, Christian Democrats.

\*\*\**Governing parties*: Venstre – the Liberal Party of Denmark, Conservative People's Party. *Government supporting party*: Danish People's party.

\*\*\*\**Governing parties*: Venstre – the Liberal Party of Denmark, Conservative People's Party. *Government supporting party*: Danish People's party, the Liberal Alliance. *Opposition/other*: Danish Social Liberal Party

\*\*\*\*\*All parties.

Source: Danish Parliament (2002, 2003, 2008, 2011).

consensus in Denmark among both the government and some opposition parties to sustain the Danish military commitment in Afghanistan. In 2006 Denmark had escalated its military presence with additional forces in the unruly Helmand province, thereby granting the war in Afghanistan heightened political attention and more visible consequences in terms of killed and wounded soldiers. The decision to deploy additional troops in Afghanistan in 2008 was based on a fragile consensus concerning the ongoing military presence and formal goals of Danish military troops alongside a growing dissensus about the realistic aims of the war in view of the human and economic costs. As in our 2001 sample, the newspaper editorials' arguments were of a more general nature and dominated by value politics, though questions of realpolitik were beginning to enter the discourse. Even though, in accordance with the elite-driven model, there was again newspaper support for the war, this support was now mixed with skepticism. The political decision to establish a no-fly zone in Libya in 2011 grew out of a different political context than did the preceding wars. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were at least officially provoked by a 'negative' context, the war on terror, whereas the military engagement in Libya was motivated by a 'positive' circumstance: the Arab spring.

In the Danish debate, the war in Libya was not primarily framed as a war to promote a regime change as in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq but, rather, as a defensive measure to prevent Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi from killing Libyan civilians in his attempt to crush a popular revolt. The arguments thus, at least implicitly, rested on the newly established international principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), adopted in 2006 by the UN Security Council Resolution 1674 (Bellamy, 2009). The Danish parliamentary decision to participate in a no-fly zone was taken with unprecedented unanimity: All political parties supported the decision, including the Red-Green Alliance, which had never before accepted a similar military intervention. The Red-Green Alliance's support was, however, withdrawn after only a very few days. The typical pattern of international alliances from the previous wars had also changed. In the case of Libya, the USA was initially hesitant about the military mission, whereas France and other European countries were strongly in favor of military engagement. Despite the shifting political constellations, we again find some confirmation of the elite-driven model. The general consensus among both national and international political elites was reflected in the broadsheet and tabloid newspapers, which unanimously supported a no-fly zone in Libya. Only the niche newspaper *Information*, which traditionally finds its readers on the left, stood out with critical comments in a situation in which even the left-wing parties supported the war. The newspapers were rather more explicit about the use of Danish military forces and their mission in Libya, but this was framed as a humanitarian mission in accordance with international society's 'responsibility to protect'.

## **Conclusion**

In general, our combined qualitative and quantitative analysis of all four sample periods provides support for the elite-driven model's hypothesis of a close connection between the degree of consensus among the political elites and newspaper opinion on the matter.

We find that a high degree of consensus among the elites is followed by a high degree of consensus among the newspapers. In the case of political dissensus (Iraq), there is also a higher degree of dissensus in the newspapers' editorial outlooks. Politically, the longest lasting war, Afghanistan, has been characterized by considerable consensus over the course of a number of years even though political criticism and doubt have been in greater evidence during the later years. This consensus has been accompanied by editorials focusing on ideological arguments and value politics (war on terror, humanitarian development, etc.) rather than on questions of realpolitik, e.g. specific missions, goals, and losses of the Danish military contingent.

The findings also point to nuances and limits to the explanatory force of the elitedriven model. Most obviously, a niche newspaper like *Information* is less influenced by contemporary political elite trends and is able to sustain a critical position, even when the entire political spectrum supports a different policy. Such a niche newspaper obviously plays an independent role in opinion formation. The ability of other types of newspapers to play a more independent role seems more linked with the level of political consensus or dissensus to which they may contribute but on which they are obviously also dependent. Finally, our analysis points to the fact that, when it comes to foreign and military policy, we must take into account that the interplay between a small country's political elite and the press is highly intermeshed with relations to foreign elites and global news media. Both Danish politicians and news media may to a large extent take into account the actions and policies of foreign elite actors, and the global news media are often a crucial source for information.

The dominant newspaper editorial framing of Denmark's war efforts as motivated by either general concerns of international politics or higher humanitarian ideals may at a more general level reflect the fact that Denmark in all three cases fought 'wars of choice' (Jakobsen and Møller, 2012: 120). The war efforts have not been driven by direct threats



to Denmark's security, and as a small nation, Denmark has no substantial global interests to defend. War efforts have been prompted by general considerations of foreign policy alliances and domestic value politics. This has led to a focus on ideals and values, with less emphasis on *realpolitik*. Writing from a British perspective, Chandler (2002: 221) suggests that 'foreign policy has become increasingly important to the domestic agenda as an area in which governments and leading politicians are more likely to be able to present themselves as having a sense of purpose or "mission".' This domestic value dimension of the war efforts may be even more pronounced in the case of Denmark. Alongside other value politics issues (like immigration, and the environment), the political commitment to the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya became litmus tests for political credibility during the past decade. The prominent marketing of the humanitarian framing of war by the right-wing governing alliance and newspapers in the first part of the decade, Denmark's new so-called 'activist foreign policy', and the subsequent gradual acceptance of this framing of war by the centre-left parties and newspapers has made the use of military missions in other countries much more acceptable to the Danish public than previously.

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### **Author biographies**

*Stig Hjarvard* is Professor of Media Studies and Vice-Chair at the Department of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen. His research interests include journalism, media history, media and globalization, media and religion, and mediatization theory. He is chief editor of the journals *Northern Lights* (Intellect Press) and *Journal of Media, Cognition and*

*Communication* (Royal Danish Library). His most recent books in English are *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives* (co-edited with Mia Lövheim, Nordicom, 2012) and *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (Routledge, 2013).

*Nete Nørgaard Kristensen* is Associate Professor at the Department of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen. Her research interests include cultural journalism and lifestyle journalism, media coverage of war and conflict, political communication, journalism as a profession, including journalism–source relations. Her most recent research has been published in journals such as *Digital Journalism*, *Journalism Practice*, *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, *Nordicom Review* and *Northern Lights*. Furthermore she is the author of several books in Danish (*Kulturjournalistik – Journalistik om kultur/Cultural Journalism – Journalism on Culture*, co-authored with Unni From, Samfundslitteratur, 2011; *Krigen i medierne – Medierne i krig/War in the Media – The Media at War*, co-authored and co-edited with Mark Blach-Ørsten, Samfundslitteratur, 2006; *Journalister og kilder – slinger i valsen?/Journalists and Sources – Is There a Hitch?*, Ajour, 2004)